

## 8. JEWS AS A MINORITY – THE TREND TOWARDS PHILOSEMITISM

Hannah Arendt describes *political* antisemitism as follows:

we find the Jews always represented as an international trade organization, a world-wide family concern with identical interests everywhere, a secret force behind the throne which degrades all visible governments into mere facade, or into marionettes whose strings are manipulated from behind the scenes...<sup>548</sup>

Thus *political* antisemitism identifies Jews with power, whereas religious anti-Jewish stereotypes and hatred of Jews is linked with *traditional* antisemitism. Philosemitism can also be divided into modern *political* philosemitism and *traditional* philosemitism, one of the main concerns of which was to convert Jews to Christianity. This chapter endeavours to show that *political* philosemitism played a significant role in the process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Although in the course of history there have been antisemitic incidents in the region of the former Yugoslavia, it has never been a place of deep-seated, traditional antisemitism. During the inter-war period antisemitism existed mainly at the level of belief and feeling, though it became more visible towards the end of the 1930s in practically all parts of Yugoslavia. However, in comparison with the neighbouring Jewries, the situation was far better in Yugoslavia.<sup>549</sup> There was no state-sponsored or tolerated antisemitism in Yugoslavia as in many other European Communist states. Individual cases of expressions of antisemitism were all tried under the Law on the Prohibition of the Incitement of Ethnic, Racial, and Religious Hatred and Dissension.<sup>550</sup> The Yugoslav press, however, became increasingly anti-Israel, even antisemitic towards the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s. The degree of adaptation of the Jewish Federation to the prevailing system in Yugoslavia is easily detected in their defence of the Yugoslav press against foreign sources attacking it as antisemitic. The London-based *Jewish Chronicle* published an article under the headline 'Yugoslav Papers Become Antisemitic', and consequently the Federation accused the *Chronicle* of being sensationalist and working against the interests of Jewry in Yugoslavia and Jewry in general.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> Arendt, Hannah: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958 (2nd ed.), 28.

<sup>549</sup> Sekelj 1993, 67–71.

<sup>550</sup> Sekelj 1998, 7.

Laslo Sekelj divides antisemitism into four different stages in post-war Yugoslavia: (1) 1945–67, a period characterised by the lack of any public display of antisemitism; (2) 1967–88, a period of antisemitism disguised as anti-Zionism; (3) 1988–91, a period of ‘republicanisation’ and the ‘functionalisation’ of Jews and (4) 1991 to the present day, the emergence of antisemitism.<sup>552</sup> The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the related murderous war caused no significant change in the low level of antisemitic tradition. This war, mainly fought between the different major nationalities, provided abundant scapegoats for hate and suspicion, running from historic misinterpretations and fabrications, especially of the events of the Second World War, to spreading hatred against religions, especially Islam.

The Jews, however, had a role of their own, a role imposed on them by the authorities mainly in three major republics of the former Yugoslavia i.e. Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. This role was one which Jews themselves obviously viewed with aversion. Jews of the former Yugoslavia have often brought up the problem of philosemitism, often expressed as the claim ‘to be the best friends of Jews’ repeated by all the major national groups amid the disintegration of Yugoslavia.<sup>553</sup> Thus the role planned for the tiny Jewish minority exceeded all proportion in view of their numerical size. Their role was to be an instrument for propagandist purposes to demonstrate democracy in the eyes of international community. To this end, good relations were fostered with the Jewish minority. Philosemitism took, of course, a variety of forms in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. Croats claimed similarity with Jews as they had been forced to live in Diaspora like the Jews, Bosnians equated their genocide at the hands of the Serbs to the Holocaust, and Serbs found parallels in their victimisation during the Second World War together with Jews. On a more general level, Serbs and Croats reminded Jews of their common enemy: Muslims.<sup>554</sup> These arguments were set out in order to ally Jews with their particular host authorities.

### 8.1. ANTISEMITISM

General assessments in the *Antisemitism World Reports* record no major threat of antisemitism in the former Yugoslavia. The *Report* of 1992 mentions the explosion at the Jewish community centre in Zagreb as well as Tudjman’s infamous book.<sup>555</sup> The 1993 *Report* highlights the glorification of the Ustaša movement in Croatia as well as the attempts underway to rehabilitate fascists active in Serbia during World

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<sup>551</sup> Freidenreich 1979, 208.

<sup>552</sup> Sekelj 1998, 7.

<sup>553</sup> Čerešnješ 23.5.1999; Finci 13.3.2000; I. Goldstein 14.6.1996.

<sup>554</sup> Finci 13.3.2000.

<sup>555</sup> *Antisemitism World Report 1992*. London: Institute of Jewish Affairs 1992, 69–70.

War II.<sup>556</sup> This included the attempt to rehabilitate, among other Serbian World War II fascists, Dmitrije Ljotić, whose troops aided the Nazis in the extermination of Serbian Jewry, and Milan Nedić, a co-organiser of the murder of Serbian Jews.<sup>557</sup> A year later the *Report* notes that a rather large number of articles expressing anti-semitic attitudes were published in Serbia during 1993.<sup>558</sup> The *Report* of 1995 shows concern over the continuing rehabilitation of Ustaša figures and elements in Croatia. In Serbia, there were a number of reprints during 1994 of anti-Jewish books published during the Second World War.<sup>559</sup> The general assessment in 1996 was that there was no serious problem of antisemitism in Croatia or in Serbia, although incidences of antisemitism continued in the press and in the statements of certain figures in Serbia.<sup>560</sup> The *Antisemitism World Report* shows quite clearly that the level of antisemitism after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in its successor states has remained stable with no remarkable increase or decrease, thus supporting the perception that traditional antisemitism in the region of Yugoslavia has been a marginal phenomenon.

The most common instances of antisemitism have emerged in print. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published again in different parts of the former Yugoslavia, for example.<sup>561</sup> In Serbia it appeared in the bookstores in 1994 and the Federation filed a suit against its publisher and protested against it through the media.<sup>562</sup> *Bilten* judged that antisemitism in Serbia was a by-product of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, being closely associated with nationalism and xenophobia. The Jews were selected as targets by nationalists because they were considered to be 'lovers of the USA'.<sup>563</sup> Obviously the situation became more severe in Serbia as its international isolation continues and sanctions remain in place. An atmosphere of national and religious intolerance has been growing in strength with the coming to power of the Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka, SRS) in the municipality of Belgrade in November 1996. On July 24, 1997, nine gravestones were demolished in the Jewish cemetery of Zemun, and this act of vandalism brought protests from the Federation in a communiqué issued on July 29, 1997. Before this, the new municipality of Zemun gave permission for a cafe to be opened in the

<sup>556</sup> *Antisemitism World Report 1993*. London: Institute of Jewish Affairs 1993, 107–108.

<sup>557</sup> *Antisemitism World Report 1993*, 107. For more on this see Cohen 1996, 73–81.

<sup>558</sup> *Antisemitism World Report 1994*. London: Institute of Jewish Affairs 1994, 157.

<sup>559</sup> *Antisemitism World Report 1995*. London – New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs and the American Jewish Committee 1995, 103–104, 246–247.

<sup>560</sup> *Antisemitism World Report 1996*. London – New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs and the American Jewish Committee 1996, 101, 267.

<sup>561</sup> See Sekelj 1998, 12–14.

<sup>562</sup> *Bilten* (Belgrade) 4/1994.

<sup>563</sup> *Bilten* (Belgrade) 4/1996.

former synagogue in Rabbi Jehuda Haj Alkalaj Street, in spite of an appeal by the representative of Jewish community for the building to be used for a more appropriate purpose.<sup>564</sup> This incident can hardly be regarded as an example of anti-semitism, but shows a lack of sensitivity towards the Jewish heritage in Serbia.

The political and economic situation in Yugoslavia caused worries for Jewish leaders in the annual meeting of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia in December 1998. The alliance of the rightist Serbian Radical Party with the ruling coalition caused concern. Disappointment was also expressed about the fact that no progress had been made with the restitution problem and that antisemitic incidents were on the increase.<sup>565</sup> To tackle this growing concern, it was decided by the Executive committee of the Federation in November 1998 that each community should assign one of their members to record antisemitic incidents and report them to the Federation Watch Committee.<sup>566</sup>

The lack of real legal intervention in the case of those who committed anti-semitic acts or those who financed or published anti-Jewish writings is seen by Sekelj as the main problem in Serbia and Montenegro; his conclusion is that anti-semitism in Serbia and Montenegro is a constant but marginal phenomenon.<sup>567</sup>

As far as Croatia is concerned, inevitably Franjo Tudjman's book *Bespuća Povijesne Zbiljnosti* ('Wastelands of Historical Realities'), published in 1988 by Matice Hrvatske, caused the biggest international furore prior to Croatia's independence. The book's antisemitic and anti-Israeli comments were the principal reasons for Israel not establishing diplomatic relations with Croatia.<sup>568</sup> The Serbian propaganda machine made use of Tudjman's book in order to portray him as an anti-Semite by producing a seventeen-page pamphlet in Belgrade called *Franjo Tudjman on the Jews*, which offered selected parts of *Bespuća* translated into English.<sup>569</sup> Tudjman's book also offended Croatian Jews and the then President of the Zagreb Jewish community, Slavko Goldstein, charged the book with antisemitism and requested its banning.<sup>570</sup> Finally, in 1994, Tudjman agreed that some parts of his

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<sup>564</sup> *Bilten* (Belgrade) 9/1997.

<sup>565</sup> *Bilten* (Belgrade) 1/ 1999.

<sup>566</sup> *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1998.

<sup>567</sup> Sekelj 1998, 20–21.

<sup>568</sup> Vuletić, Dean: *Wastelands of Diplomatic Reality: Relations between Croatia and Israel, 1991–1999*. Unpublished thesis for a Bachelor of Arts with Honours degree in the Department of Classical and Modern European Languages, the Australian National University, November 1999, 35–36.

<sup>569</sup> Franjo Tudjman on the Jews (excerpts from the book: 'Wastelands – Historical Truth', F. Tudjman: *Bespuća – povijesne zbiljnosti*, 2nd edition, Naklandi zavod Matice Hrvatske, Zagreb 1989), translated from Croatian by Vida Janković and Svetlana Raićević. See more about this in A. Knežević 1992, 52–68.

<sup>570</sup> Vuletić 1999, 38.

book were offensive to Jews, and subsequently in a letter to the President of B'nai B'rith, Kent Schiner, on February 10, 1994<sup>571</sup>, he apologised for these parts of his book, promising to delete them from the English edition of *Bespuća*.<sup>572</sup> Earlier, Tudjman had sent a clarifying letter to Members of the U.S. Congress on January 21, 1992, after he was accused of being an anti-Semite by the U.S. press. In this letter Tudjman gave the assurance that 'I will not tolerate antisemitism in any form whatsoever'.<sup>573</sup> Anto Knežević in his book *An Analysis of Serbian Propaganda*<sup>574</sup> made a skilful attempt to explain away the antisemitic portions of Tudjman's book.<sup>575</sup> Knežević is quite convincing in rehabilitating Tudjman from the black spots of his book, only failing to mention that Tudjman had already espoused very similar thoughts much earlier in his *Nationalism in Contemporary Europe*, published in 1981.<sup>576</sup> All in all, this only shows that Tudjman was a controversial personality stumbling over contradictory statements he made on the Jews and Israel. Consequently it is difficult to assess whether he was genuinely antisemitic or not. Certainly there were contradictions in his behaviour, and after Croatia became independent, he was benevolent to the Jews but simultaneously allowed the rehabilitation of former Ustaša functionaries. To combat this latter phenomenon, the Jewish community of Zagreb made a proposal to the Croatian parliament with the aim of rooting out elements supporting rehabilitation of the Ustaša period in Croatia.<sup>577</sup> This astonishing wavering back and forth between philosemitism and Ustaša rehabilitation is perhaps most accurately explained by Slavko Goldstein when he describes Tudjman and his HDZ party as

seeking to combine national radicalism with proclamations of tolerance, threats of war with a policy of appeasement, the partisan antifascist tradition with the policy of the Ustaše ideals and symbols.<sup>578</sup>

During the election campaign of 1990, the three leading figures of the victorious Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ) party had already made antisemitic remarks in a broader context, the main target of which were the Serbs: Franjo Tudjman 'my wife is, fortunately, neither Serbian nor Jewish', Vladimir Šeks 'evil

<sup>571</sup> CAHJP/EA/G-970: Copy of the letter from Tudjman to Schiner, 10.2.1994.

<sup>572</sup> The English edition was published in 1996 under the title *Horrors of War: Historical Reality and Philosophy*. All the remarks perceived as antisemitic or anti-Israeli were removed from this edition (Vuletić 1999, 39).

<sup>573</sup> Letter from Tudjman to Members of the U.S. Congress, January 21, 1992.

<sup>574</sup> A. Knežević 1992.

<sup>575</sup> A. Knežević 1992, 9–68.

<sup>576</sup> See for example: Tudjman, Franjo: *Nationalism in Contemporary Europe*. Boulder: East European Monographs 1981, 280.

<sup>577</sup> Mirković 9.3.2000.

<sup>578</sup> Cited in Balas 1995, 220.

Jews', and Šime Djodan 'Serbs and Jews are conducting a campaign against Croatia abroad'.<sup>579</sup> It can be assumed that the activities of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society in Belgrade at least partly gave rise to these statements, as the speakers of the Society gave the general impression that the Jews of Serbia supported the Serbian nationalistic policy.<sup>580</sup>

The independence of Croatia brought new state symbols, a flag with a red and white chequered shield in the middle, and a new currency, the Kuna. Both the currency and the flag were in use during the former Ustaša period. Some Jews felt uneasy at seeing symbols with links to Croatia's Ustaša past.<sup>581</sup> In 1990 the Square of the Victims of Fascism in Zagreb had already been renamed as the Square of Croatian Rulers, for example. The Jewish community of Zagreb sent a letter of protest to the city council of Zagreb objecting to the renaming of the square.<sup>582</sup> The so-called 'Ustashisation' progressed: streets named after partisans, anti-Fascists or Ustaša victims were renamed, and some 2,000 memorials dedicated to the victims of Fascism or to partisans were destroyed or vandalised.<sup>583</sup> This development, which even led in some quarters to the denial of the Holocaust,<sup>584</sup> understandably aroused suspicion, and perhaps confusion among the Croatian Jews. All of a sudden the Jews realised that with the collapse of Yugoslavia they were facing a new regime which had suspiciously favourable sentiments towards the Independent State of Croatia. Nonetheless, Croatia's Jews continued to express loyalty to the country in which they were living.

It is significant that the Jewish community was targeted during the very initial stage of the war in former Yugoslavia. August 19, 1991, is recorded as a day of gloom in the history of the Zagreb Jewish community. In the early hours of that day an explosion damaged the Zagreb Jewish Community Centre in Palmotičeva Street. The building itself was badly damaged, but fortunately there were no casualties. Another explosion occurred at the same time in the Jewish section of the Mirogoj cemetery in Zagreb. The whole community was shocked by these incidents.<sup>585</sup>

The general situation at the time of these explosions was tense. Fighting had been going on between Croats and Croatian Serbs for two months and the future was uncertain. War propaganda was diverting people's minds to the horrific images of World War II. Memories of the battles between Ustašas, Četniks and Partisans and their mutual atrocities were revived and republicised, often fabricated to suit the

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<sup>579</sup> Sekelj 1998, 9.

<sup>580</sup> Sekelj 1998, 11.

<sup>581</sup> Šprajc 13.6.1996.

<sup>582</sup> For a copy of the letter, see *Bilten* (Tel Aviv) 1/1991, 7.

<sup>583</sup> Gruden, Živko: "What's in a label, and what's behind it?" *Voice*, Spring 1996, 15.

<sup>584</sup> I. Goldstein 9.1.2001.

<sup>585</sup> Šprajc 13.6.1996.

prevailing situation. Serbia regarded the attack against the Jewish community centre as a sign of Fascism in Croatia. Less than an hour after the attack Belgrade's official news agency announced that the attack had been carried out by Croatian nationalists.<sup>586</sup>

The truth about the attack, however, still seems to be uncertain. The Croatian police has not yet solved the case, and the Croats regard it as unsolved.<sup>587</sup> Paradoxically enough, the alleged attackers have already been brought to trial in Serbia! The Belgrade based weekly *NIN* reported that the blowing up of the Jewish centre in Zagreb was part of a larger operation, code-named 'Opera Orientalis', which was aimed at bringing worldwide reproach on the Croats, and at promoting the unity of Yugoslavia by preventing Croatian and Slovenian secessions. Two men, a Serb born in Croatia and a Jew, appeared in court in Belgrade charged with blowing up the Jewish centre on the orders of the Yugoslav air force intelligence service. A group of high-ranking Serbian Army officers were also charged with them. The reason for these legal proceedings in Belgrade was the effort to get rid of the old, Communist-minded officers.<sup>588</sup> This is a plausible explanation, and most probably the attack was engineered by the Serbs in order to blame the Croats for it. It was certainly in the interest of the Belgrade regime to prevent the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia, and the incident would have provided support for Serbian claims concerning the existence of Fascism in Croatia. Nevertheless, the possibility that Croatian extremists were responsible for the action cannot yet be ruled out.

Immediately after the incident the state of Croatia granted an interest-free loan to the Zagreb Jewish community for the renovation of the centre. The renovations took place without delay, and the opening ceremony of the entirely renovated centre took place on the eve of the Jewish New Year in 1992.<sup>589</sup> The loan given by the state of Croatia actually became a gift since the community has not been obliged to pay it back.<sup>590</sup> Damage from the explosion at the Jewish community centre was estimated at about one million DM, and the sum the government provided was about three times the estimated cost of the repairs. This enabled the Jewish community to rebuild the centre completely. Because of this donation the Government expected the support of the Jewish community, and received it.

In fact the explosion at the community centre was not deliberately targeted against Jews, but instead had much wider links with the general political situation of

<sup>586</sup> Teitelbaum 1992; Tsur "Anatomy of a Balkan frame-up". *Jerusalem Post* 3.2.1993.

<sup>587</sup> I. Goldstein 14.6.1996; Šprajc 13.6.1996.

<sup>588</sup> Jovanović, *NIN* 20.5.1994. Laslo Sekelj also seems to be of the opinion that the act was carried out by the ex-Yugoslav secret service, see Sekelj 1998, 10. See also Cohen 1996, 127.

<sup>589</sup> *Jewish Heritage in Zagreb and Croatia*, Zagreb 1993, 5.

<sup>590</sup> Šprajc 13.6.1996.

the time. The Jewish community, as a sensitive group in this setting, offered a perfect target for this sort of operation. Nevertheless, it shows the way the Jewish community was utilised as an object for the sake of political ends in collapsing Yugoslavia. The speculations, uncertainties and complexities involved in the explosion at the Jewish centre perfectly illustrate the complexity of war and politics in the former Yugoslavia.

The main cause of anxiety in the relationship between the Jews and the Croatian state is the fact that the state failed to make a clear distinction between itself and the so-called independent State of Croatia that existed during World War II.<sup>591</sup> Jews in Croatia were especially irritated by Franjo Tudjman's attempt to convert the memorial of the victims of the fascist regime in Jasenovac into a 'memorial ground of Croatian war victims' of both fascism and communism. Slavko Goldstein wrote an open letter to Tudjman asking him to drop the initiative to redesign the Jasenovac Memorial. 'If your intention is realised I will sue you for desecrating memorial sites and graveyards, as the initiator and the one who gave orders', was Goldstein's response in a letter published by the independent weekly *Feral Tribune*.<sup>592</sup> Slavko Goldstein was vocal in his resistance to the use of Ustaša symbols by Tudjman's regime. In the company of other Croatian intellectuals, he wrote an open letter to Tudjman in October 1993 calling on him to resign: 'In the name of alleged national reconciliation you have permitted an invasion of Ustaša symbols and songs, the renaming of streets and institutions, the revision of history...'.<sup>593</sup> Shortly afterwards the Jewish community of Zagreb sent a similar letter calling on Tudjman to reverse the decision to rename the Croatian dinar after the kuna, to halt the transfer to Jasenovac of the remains of those killed at Bleiburg, and to stop municipalities from renaming streets and schools after Ustaša leaders. In the letter they stated: 'We are worried by the repeated attempts to rehabilitate the Ustaša Independent State of Croatia.'<sup>594</sup> Not only was the Square of the Victims of Fascism renamed, but also almost anyone who was executed by the Ustaša or who died as an anti-fascist or Partisan has had their names removed from the register of city streets. All over Croatia, streets were named after Mila Budak, deputy head of the Independent State of Croatia, who signed into force the racial laws in Croatia.<sup>595</sup>

Between December 1998 and February 1999 there were antisemitic outbursts on Croatian television spreading hatred towards Serbs and Jews.<sup>596</sup> Consequently the Zagreb Jewish community council debated whether to react or not, with some of

<sup>591</sup> Šprajc 13.6.1996.

<sup>592</sup> Cited in *Jerusalem Post* 8.2.1996.

<sup>593</sup> Cited in Tanner 1997, 291.

<sup>594</sup> Cited in Tanner 1997, 291.

<sup>595</sup> Gruden 1996, 14.

<sup>596</sup> I. Goldstein 11.3.2000; *ha-Kol* 57–58, 1999, 1–2.



the Jews afraid that to react might be counter-productive, fearing the possible consequences.<sup>597</sup> Eventually the Jewish community took a public stand by publishing an announcement protesting about these incidents<sup>598</sup> and organising a press conference on March 2, 1999, about the latest antisemitic outbursts in Croatia.<sup>599</sup>

Another ominous incident took place in Osijek, Croatia, in May 1999, which, though ostensibly minor, reveals a lack of respect for the Jewish minority. A fire caused by negligence partly damaged the building of the Osijek Jewish community in Radićeva Street. In fact, the Jewish community only uses a small part of the building, the bigger part of it being used by the Osijek University Faculty of Law. The Croatian Ministry of Science financed repairs costing 2 million DM. The opening ceremony of the refurbished building in May 1999 was attended by high-level Croatian officials, including the Prime Minister. Immediately before the opening ceremony, an inscribed tablet on the exterior wall of the building announcing that the Jewish community of Osijek was located in the building was removed, and in its place was put a sign of the Faculty of Law. Moreover, during the ceremony the fact that the whole building belonged to the Jewish community was not mentioned. Only after the ceremony was the community's tablet returned to its proper place. The community president Darko Fischer regards this incident, a minor one in itself, as an example of the general attitude towards Jews. Because the Jews are so few in number, 'they treat us as they wish'.<sup>600</sup>

One of the latest incidents requiring Jewish community intervention in Croatia was the protest against the findings of the special Parliamentary Commission for Investigating the Numbers of the Holocaust, which came up with a total of only several hundred victims. The conclusions of the Commission were not accepted after the protests.<sup>601</sup> In general, however, antisemitic incidents in Croatia have been sporadic and Croatia's Jews do not feel threatened. They would, however, prefer to see a more prompt response by the Government to these incidents.<sup>602</sup>

The nature of antisemitism in Serbia and Croatia has been similar, with the main incidents being press writings and public statements. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the difficulties faced in this sense have been, to some extent, different. As was pointed out in the chapter dealing with the emigration, the departure of Bosnian Jews generated a negative attitude towards Jews. At least one episode can be recounted which perhaps was an attempt to discredit, or at least warn, the Sarajevo Jewish community and its leadership. In July 1994 the local police arrested and

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<sup>597</sup> I. Goldstein 11.3.2000.

<sup>598</sup> *ha-Kol* 57–58, 1999, 1–2.

<sup>599</sup> *ha-Kol* 59–60, 1999, 21–23.

<sup>600</sup> Fischer 10.3.2000.

<sup>601</sup> *Croatia. In Memory to Holocaust* 2000, 7.

<sup>602</sup> I. Goldstein 14.6.1996.

interrogated a number of Sarajevo Jews, some of whom held dual Bosnian-Israeli citizenship. These people were later released but passports and communal documents were seized. Bosnian officials accused the Jews of acting against Bosnian national interests and of helping the enemy and acting politically against Bosnia, an accusation refuted by Čerešnješ. Moreover, they were suspected of holding falsified passports.<sup>603</sup> As Čerešnješ drew international Jewish attention to the incident,<sup>604</sup> the Prime Minister of Bosnia, Haris Silajdžić, wrote a letter to the Chief Executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews informing him that the police action was taken to prevent the unlawful issuing of Israeli passports to citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina by some unauthorised individuals from the Jewish community, and ultimately the leaders of the Sarajevo Jewish community were told that they were not allowed to issue Israeli passports without authorisation.<sup>605</sup> This episode is to be seen in the context of the preparations to enable Jews to leave Sarajevo and the delivery of 49 Israeli passports to Bosnian Jews, as related in the chapter dealing with the emigration. Obviously Bosnian officials felt the need to undertake disciplinary action in order to remind Jews that their activities in the passport affair had exceeded the limits of propriety. The Jewish community of Sarajevo was not supposed to function as an embassy.

Some dark clouds, however, have begun to hover over the Sarajevo Jewish community since the end of the war. Disputes about property (the non-return of apartments) have put the Jewish community on a collision course with the Bosnian Government. The Bosnian Government allocated about 300 empty apartments owned by emigrant Jews to its own supporters.<sup>606</sup> Some Jews, on their return to Sarajevo after the Dayton Agreement, were not given back their former apartments, which they had left at the beginning of war. The Jewish community of Sarajevo and the Sarajevo municipality made an agreement at the beginning of war, in November 1992, about the disposal of abandoned apartments. According to the agreement with the City Council, all apartments where Jews used to live (the apartments themselves being state property) were at the disposal of the city for those who needed them during the war, but after the end of the war, these apartments would be returned to the Jews, who would continue to hold tenancy rights for these apartments, within 15 days. Of the total of 240 apartments 150 were reclaimed, and up to March 2000 only 82 of this 150 had been in fact returned. The Jewish community continues to fight for the return of the remaining apartments.<sup>607</sup>

<sup>603</sup> Cited in the *Jewish Chronicle* 2.9.1994; Čerešnješ Papers: letter from Ivan Čerešnješ to Tuvya Raviv, October 5, 1994.

<sup>604</sup> Čerešnješ 26.5.1999.

<sup>605</sup> Čerešnješ Papers: letter from Haris Silajdžić to Neville Nagler, October 7, 1994.

<sup>606</sup> Wilkinson, Tracy: "Place for Jews in Sarajevo?" *Los Angeles Times* 30.4.1996.

<sup>607</sup> Finci 13.3.2000.

## 8.2. PROPERTY RESTITUTION

The Institute of the World Jewish Congress in its publication on the restitution of Jewish property<sup>608</sup> reviews the process of restitution after the fall of Communist governments in East and Central Europe. In its summary the author, Laurence Weinbaum, highlights a disturbing pattern in the restitution question, in that governments have tended to enact legislation restricting the rights of Jewish communities to reclaim their property. Laws preventing foreign citizens from making claims have also been passed.<sup>609</sup> This legislation especially affects Jews who left their countries of birth either during the Second World War or after it during the communist period. Hindrances of this kind were, and still are, very current in the former Yugoslavia, especially in Serbia and Croatia, countries which are not even mentioned in the country summary of this report.

The property of Jews in Yugoslavia was seized by the occupation authorities of Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, as well as by the authorities of the so-called Independent State of Croatia during World War II. After the war Yugoslavia adopted a restitution law which enabled those Jewish communities and synagogues which restarted their work to gain back their property. The nationalisation which was carried out later on included all citizens, so that an extensive part of already restored Jewish property (apartments) came under the nationalisation regulations. The situation was slightly different concerning the property of the Jewish communities. Cemeteries, synagogues and communal offices were wholly or partly excluded from the nationalisation regulations, while Jewish schools, hospitals and old people's homes were nationalised. The Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia succeeded in keeping ownership of its own building, later handed over for the use of the Israeli Embassy in Belgrade, although formally the building is still owned by the Federation. The Belgrade Jewish community and its various institutions had other real estate properties in their possession, but ultimately only one building was left in which the Jewish community of Belgrade, the Federation of Jewish Communities and the Jewish Historical Museum are currently located. Another building with 16 big apartments, a large concert hall and accessories was nationalised. In 1991 a number of apartments in this building were sold to the tenants despite protests by the Federation, which pointed out that the adoption of a law concerning the restitution of the property previously owned by religious communities was expected. Until 1995 nothing in Yugoslavia had been returned to the previous owners except for some land which had been returned to farmers. Nevertheless, the Federation is working on collecting the documentation about the

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<sup>608</sup> Weinbaum, Laurence: *Righting an Historic Wrong. Restitution of Jewish Property in Central and East Europe*. Jerusalem: Institute of the World Jewish Congress 1995.

<sup>609</sup> Weinbaum 1995, 4.

Jewish property.<sup>610</sup> In the summer of 2000, the President of the Federation, Aća Singer, described the situation as still difficult, with no progress made with regard to the restitution of property to individuals, either Jews or non-Jews. The Federation is now concentrating on the question of restitution of communal property. Promises have been made at the highest level of the Serbian regime about the return of property, but nothing has been implemented so far.<sup>611</sup>

Several Denationalisation Bills and Bills on the Return of Property have been proposed in the Republic of Croatia since 1990. The current version of the Compensation for Confiscated Property Bill was submitted to Parliament by the Ministry of Justice as a Government proposal on December 4, 1995. In general these Bills, including this latest proposal, have only provided for the restoration of property confiscated after May 15, 1945. This means that Jews are by and large excluded from the restoration as much of their property was taken away before 1945. The matter becomes even more complicated if the Bill requires Croatian citizenship as a condition of property restitution.<sup>612</sup>

At the beginning of 1996 the Coordination Committee of Jewish Communities in Croatia distributed a letter concerning the draft Restitution Bill to the President, Parliament and Government of Croatia, as well as to international Jewish organisation. The main object of the letter was to show that the proposed Bill discriminates against Croatian Jews and Jewish communities. According to the draft Bill, Jews, unlike other Croatian citizens, will not be in a position to have their property restored. In its letter, the Coordination Committee refers to the Resolution on Jewish assets passed by the European Parliament on December 11, 1995.<sup>613</sup> Croatian diplomats respond, however, that the law was amended to include Jewish property seized before 1945, but only on condition that the claimants are currently Croatian citizens.<sup>614</sup>

Finally the Croatian Parliament passed the Law on the Restitution of Property Expropriated During the Yugoslav Communist Regime towards the end of 1996, and it came into force on January 1, 1997. According to this Law, the Jewish community of Zagreb requests, among others, the office buildings, the Hevra Kaddiša and the Chief Rabbinate buildings. Property was also requested in other parts of Croatia. The basic problem, the restitution of what was confiscated before 1945, remains, however, largely intact.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> Čerešnješ Papers: Information about the Restitution in Yugoslavia, by Aća Singer, 8.9.1995.

<sup>611</sup> Singer 19.6.2000.

<sup>612</sup> Tabaković, Sead: "The third confiscation of Jewish property". *Voice*, Spring 1996, 26–28.

<sup>613</sup> Kraus, Ongjen: "Critical comments of the draft Bill on the restitution of confiscated property". *Voice*, Spring 1996, 28–29.

<sup>614</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 14.2.1997.

Consequently the Chairman of the Executive of the World Jewish Restitution Organisation, Israel Singer, sent a letter to Croatian president Franjo Tudjman in June 1997 protesting against the Bill Number 1600 dealing with the 'compensation for property expropriated during the Communist rule in Yugoslavia' adopted by the Croatian Parliament.<sup>616</sup> This Bill, by excluding non-Croatian citizens from restitution rights and its other flawed measures, made it practically impossible for Jews to claim restitution. Some signs of a more positive development can be seen, however, and the return to the Jewish community on December 31, 1999, of the property at 7 Praška Street, the location of the former Zagreb synagogue, after prolonged efforts since 1988, can be regarded as one of the major achievements.<sup>617</sup>

The restitution of Jewish property, and property restitution in general, is even less advanced in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The matter of restitution in Bosnia was discussed after the first democratic elections in 1990, but then war broke out, and no progress has been made since then. Ten years later, Bosnia still lacks a law on the restitution of property. However, the Jewish community is striving to reclaim a few of the numerous buildings in Sarajevo and rent them to those tenants who now occupy them. This would allow the community to finance its activities and would lessen its dependence on international Jewry.<sup>618</sup> In fact, this is a general aim of the Jewish communities in the former Yugoslavia. The restitution of Jewish property would significantly reduce their financial dependence on international Jewish organisations, as the President of the Zagreb Jewish community, Ongjen Kraus, has explicitly stated.<sup>619</sup>

### 8.3. POLITICAL PHILOSEMITISM

Philosemitism is only ostensibly the opposite of antisemitism, and as Irving Louis Horowitz has noted, the tolerance and even admiration of Jews, i.e. philosemitic behaviour, is not the same as the recognition of equal rights under the law, of Jews vis-à-vis non-Jews, in open societies.<sup>620</sup> The point is, as Horowitz shows, that both antisemitism and philosemitism make it impossible for Jews to normalise their

<sup>615</sup> Kovač Vlasta: "So far nothing spectacular. An interview with Dragan Ekštajn". *Voice*, Autumn 1998, 20–21.

<sup>616</sup> CAHJP-EA/H-69: Letter from Singer to Tudjman, June 30, 1997.

<sup>617</sup> *ha-Kol* 63–64, December 1999 – January 2000, 1.

<sup>618</sup> Finci 13.3.2000. One of those buildings is the magnificent five-storey La Benevolencija building of the pre-World War II period at La Benevolencija Street in the heart of Sarajevo. The building is currently used by the Bosnian Interior Ministry.

<sup>619</sup> Kraus, Ongjen: Speech on Yom Ha-Shoah, 16.4.1996 at the Mirogoj Cemetery in Zagreb.

<sup>620</sup> Horowitz, Irving Louis: "Philosemitism and antisemitism: Jewish conspiracies and totalitarian sentiments". *Midstream*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, May, 1990, 18.

lives.<sup>621</sup> To some extent, philosemitism is fuelled by the very same idea as anti-semitism: a Jewish conspiracy. Philosemites easily acknowledge that a group of Jews hold positions out of all proportion to their minority status; that is, they are seen as the power behind the throne, as Horowitz elaborates it.<sup>622</sup> Therefore, the roots of *political* philosemitism are basically very same as those of *political* anti-semitism, and Arendt's summary cited at the beginning of this chapter also reveals clearly the motives behind *political* philosemitism.

There seems to have been in post-war Yugoslavia a genuine belief in the might of American Jewry, and this belief also dictated to some extent the policy of the new Yugoslavia. After breaking off relations with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavia needed the help of the Western allies, above all of the United States, and therefore avoided acting in a way that might have irritated American Jewry. President Tito and Nahum Goldman, President of the World Jewish Congress, maintained friendly relations even after the break of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967. American Jewry appreciated Yugoslavia's relatively liberal emigration policy between 1948 and 1952. Moreover, before the independence of Israel and after it, Yugoslavia allowed arms shipments to Israel through its territory. Later in the 1950s Yugoslavia also served as a channel for Jews escaping from neighbouring Iron Curtain countries. This also strengthened ties between Yugoslavia and world Jewry.<sup>623</sup>

Perhaps one of the most outstanding example of the belief that Jews have a global influence came during the Kosovo war in 1999. The President of the Federation of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, Aća Singer, has said that 'many Serbs think that Jews are a superpower'. Consequently he received many letters from Yugoslavia's citizens asking Singer to influence Bill Clinton to stop the bombings.<sup>624</sup> The same war, however, proves how thin the line between philosemitic and antisemitic expressions was, since during the Kosovo war the Belgrade media brought up the fact that three unpopular American figures had Jewish connections, pointing to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Defence Secretary William Cohen and negotiator Richard Holbrooke.<sup>625</sup> The Croatian Jew Jakob Bienenfeld was amazed at how Croats really believed that Jews had a lot of influence. For this reason his requests, as he helped Jews to leave Bosnia, were never turned down.<sup>626</sup>

But first and foremost, the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society (SJFS) founded in 1988 made philosemitism an instrument in the disintegrating Yugoslavia. The

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<sup>621</sup> Horowitz 1990, 21.

<sup>622</sup> Horowitz 1990, 20.

<sup>623</sup> Čerešnješ 23.5.1999.

<sup>624</sup> Cited in *Jerusalem Report*, April 26, 1999.

<sup>625</sup> *Jerusalem Report*, April 26, 1999.

<sup>626</sup> Cited in *Maariv* 3.1.1992.

Society was founded only after the government of Serbia realised its usefulness, as formerly requests to found it were turned down.<sup>627</sup> This Society, the members of which were primarily Serbs and not Jews, became an integral tool of Serbia's nationalist policy in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the verge of collapse. The Society planned to establish branches all over the former Yugoslavia where Serbs were living,<sup>628</sup> and had close ties with nationalistically inclined Serbian politicians, among them the infamous Radovan Karadžić, the Bosnian Serb leader.<sup>629</sup> This fact alone reveals the policy the Society was pursuing. During the Society's propaganda trips to Israel and the USA, where an offshoot of the SJFS, Jewish-Serbian Friendship Society of America was founded,<sup>630</sup> an enormous number of public statements were made in support of Karadžić and Serb paramilitary forces in Bosnia and Croatia.<sup>631</sup>

While Yugoslavia was on the verge of collapse, the Republic of Serbia had already begun to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy at the end of the nineteen-eighties. The then Prime Minister of Serbia and Head of the Serbian Communist Party, Slobodan Milošević, together with the Serbian regime, supported the Society, which called for the renewal of diplomatic relations with Israel in the first paragraph of its platform, and when Yugoslavia failed to make haste to this end, the SJFS demanded that the republic of Serbia must establish diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>632</sup> The Serbian government not only co-operated with the SJFS but even directly financed it.<sup>633</sup> Milošević in the interview with the Israeli daily *Maariv* was of the opinion that full diplomatic relations between Israel and Yugoslavia must be re-established, expressing simultaneously the shared destiny of Jews and Serbs. To explain the pro-Israeli awakening in Serbia he introduced the concept of a common enemy of both countries: Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>634</sup> This pro-Israeli attitude led the writer of the above-mentioned article to estimate that if Milošević were to gain power in Yugoslavia (and not only in Serbia), not only would diplomatic relations be renewed between two countries, but also relations would be strengthened in all different fields.<sup>635</sup> This perception in Israel at least partly explains Israel's curious policy towards the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s which turned to be out

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627 Ajzinberg 14.6.2000.

628 Lungen 1990c.

629 Vuletić 1999, 10.

630 Cohen 1996, 127–128.

631 Sekelj 1998, 11.

632 *Davar* 23.10.1989.

633 Sekelj 1998, 11.

634 Cited in *Maariv* 1.2.1989.

635 *Maariv* 1.2.1989.

amazingly pro-Serbian.<sup>636</sup> In general, speakers from the SJFS in public appearances between 1991–95 made statements claiming that there had never been any antisemitism in Serbia or among the Serbs, but only eternal love and a special relationship and friendship between the Serbian nation and Jewish people at all times and everywhere.<sup>637</sup>

Serbia's propaganda efforts towards Israel and the Jews perhaps reached their zenith in the spring of 1990 when the Serbs launched a massive propaganda campaign in Israel. The highest echelons of the Republic of Serbia, including the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and the President of the Republic, visited Israel during

<sup>636</sup> For those interested in this subject, the following works are recommended: Vuletić, Dean: *Wastelands of Diplomatic Reality: Relations between Croatia and Israel, 1991–1999*. Vuletić's unpublished thesis is the most comprehensive treatise on the subject so far though its emphasis is on Croatia as the title already suggests. The following articles by Israeli Professor Igor Primoratz can be distinguished, in comparison to other Israeli writers of ex-Yugoslav origin, because it was written in a clear-headed and analytical manner: "Israel and the war in the Balkans" in *Mediterranean Politics* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1999), 79–94; and "Israel and genocide in Croatia" in Stjepan G. Meštrović (ed.): *Genocide After Emotion. The Postemotional Balkan War*. London – New York: Routledge 1996, 195–206. The last scholarly article to be mentioned on this subject is that of Kofman, Daniel: "Israel and the war in Bosnia" in Cushman, Thomas & Stjepan G. Meštrović (eds.): *This Time We Knew. Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia*. New York – London: New York University Press 1996, 90–127. Israel's pro-Serbian foreign policy following the disintegration of Yugoslavia was based on the so called 'World War Two Argument', introduced by Igor Primoratz (see *Jerusalem Post* January 23, 1994, 6 for example), which highlighted the parallel destiny of Serbs and Jews in the Second World War, and therefore steered Israel's policy towards favouring Serbia among the successor states of Yugoslavia. Of course, there were other reasons, such as the book written by Franjo Tuđman, president of Croatia, which included parts regarded as antisemitic, and the failure of new Croatia to dissociate itself from the Independent State of Croatia in 1941–44, which was a Nazi puppet-state of Germany. There was also a much stronger pro-Serbian lobby of former Yugoslav Jews in Israel than pro-Croatian lobby, which had an influence on Israel's pro-Serbian policy. All in all, it is amazing to see the extent to which skilfully implemented propaganda can influence the formulation of the official foreign policy of a particular state, in this case of Israel. Some Israelis were really harsh on Bosnian Muslims, such as Yohanan Ramati, head of the Jerusalem Institute for Western Defence, who defended the Serbs as in his opinion 'fighting in order to escape the rule of an Islamic fundamentalist despot like Izetbegović'. (Ramati, Yohanan: "Stopping the war in Yugoslavia". *Midstream* Vol. XXXX, No. 3, 1994, 3). The fear of so-called 'Islamic terrorism' steered the Israeli political establishment to oppose, at least at the beginning, the Kosovo War and the NATO campaign. Israelis (above all the Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, quoted as saying that 'Israel is liable to become the next victim of a NATO intervention', cited in *Haaretz* 9.4.1999) saw Kosovo as an example of NATO defending Muslims, and feared that the same could happen in the Middle East (*Haaretz* 31.3.1999, 2.4.1999 and *the Other Israel*, No. 88, May 1999). The Israeli reaction may well have underlying psychological reasons, especially among the elder generation of the political establishment; the flood of Kosovars fleeing Kosovo evoked images of Palestinian refugee about 50 years earlier in the eyes of those who witnessed them. As Israelis contributed to the Palestinian plight, they tended to see themselves on the same side as the aggressors in Kosovo, i.e. Serbs. (see Primoratz 1999, 87–92.)

<sup>637</sup> Sekelj 1998, 11.



the spring.<sup>638</sup> Eleven mayors of the main cities of Serbia participated in the visit. Only a few weeks before these visits the parliament of Serbia decided to call on the presidency of Yugoslavia to renew diplomatic relations with Israel. The campaign culminated in a Serbian Week arranged in Israel from May 22–26, 1990, in which about 400 Serbian officials were promoting Serbian products. The Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society also initiated the idea of twinning between Serbian and Israeli towns.<sup>639</sup> This Serbian propaganda campaign arriving in Israel guaranteed that at least Serbia's point of view about the situation in the former Yugoslavia was heard in Israel, and consequently, the Israeli press repeated quite faithfully the slogan of traditional Serbian-Jewish friendship and great relations between two nations.<sup>640</sup> In a reciprocal visit to the visit of Serbian mayors to Israel, mayors of ten Israeli cities visited, and were entertained by ten cities in Serbia in June 1990. The mayors also had contacts with high officials of the Serbian Government, the Belgrade Jewish community and the SJFS.<sup>641</sup>

The focal point of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society was its promotion of the ideas of traditional friendship and historical and cultural ties between the Serbian and Jewish nations. The parallel destiny of two nations in the genocides of the Second World War was especially emphasised.<sup>642</sup> More sceptical observers, however, pointed out that this scheme of 'befriending the Jews' was devised in Belgrade as a last-ditch effort to save the Belgrade Communists from international isolation.<sup>643</sup> The intention was not only to ward off Serbia's isolation but also through Israel to influence the 'Jewish lobby' in the USA in order to gain understanding among the American public for Serbia's actions in Kosovo.<sup>644</sup> There were also other goals in the effort to use Israel as Serbia's backdoor to the international arena. Israel was perceived as a good bridgehead for penetrating the markets of the EC and the USA.<sup>645</sup> Serbian propaganda obviously also influenced Warren Zimmerman, the US Ambassador to Yugoslavia, who expressed his concern about

<sup>638</sup> These visits also had bizarre and highly questionable dimensions, at least in retrospect. Milomir Jakovlević, State Prosecutor of Serbia and a Jew, came to Israel in 1990 in order to study the handling of the *Intifada*. Jakovlević was intending to use in Kosovo the methods he learned on his visit in Israel e.g. demolishing houses and dispersing demonstrations. The basic problem in Kosovo, according to Jakovlević, is Muslim fundamentalism. One lesson he drew from Israel was that there is no need to worry over international reactions about human rights! Cited in *Maariv* 6.11.1990.

<sup>639</sup> *Haaretz* 7.6.1990; *Politika* 15.2.1990.

<sup>640</sup> *Haaretz* 7.6.1990.

<sup>641</sup> *Jevrejski Pregled*, No. 3–6, 1990.

<sup>642</sup> *Politika* 14.1.1990.

<sup>643</sup> Cited in *Jerusalem Post* 26.12.1989.

<sup>644</sup> *Maariv* 1.2.1989.

<sup>645</sup> *Haaretz* 7.6.1990.

Serbs and Jews living in Croatia in an interview given to the Belgrade weekly *NIN* on July 6, 1990.<sup>646</sup>

Serbia's effort to lay guilt for the Holocaust in Serbia exclusively on the Germans resembles the effort by the Rumanian leadership and 'official historians' in the 1970s to overlook the role Rumanians played in the mass murders. If Holocaust-related books were published, they claimed that the crimes against Jews were committed by others, Hungarians and Germans, but not by Rumanians.<sup>647</sup> Along with the rising nationalism in Serbia in the end of the eighties, a new vocabulary emerged which evoked a familiar resonance in Jewish ears, as slogans such as 'genocide against Serbia', 'the Serbian Holocaust', 'the Serb exodus'<sup>648</sup> for their part smoothed the way to gaining sympathy with a Jewish audience. With the founding of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society in 1988, as Sekelj has observed, there took place a *functionalization* of Jews – that is, the utilisation of Jews, Jewish symbols, and the Holocaust for political manipulation.<sup>649</sup> The appearance of SJFS in the media has been limited since the Dayton Accord and the ending of the war in the former Yugoslavia in 1995, except for the war in Kosovo, which indicates that the Society was used as a political tool only so far as it was useful for the government of Serbia.<sup>650</sup>

Serbia's policy was thus partly built on a philosemitic program, spearheaded by the SJFS. Although there were no official links between the Federation and the Society, and the Society received only limited support among Belgrade Jews,<sup>651</sup> several members of the Belgrade Jewish community expressed their open support for the Society and Milošević's nationalistic policy. Indeed, among the founders of the Society were prominent Jews: Andrija Gams, Enriko Josif,<sup>652</sup> Filip David and David Albahari. Albahari, the President of the Federation during that period, left the SJFS once it became obviously a political organisation.<sup>653</sup> However, more significant is the presence of Serbian nationalists among the founders, among them the

<sup>646</sup> Cited in *Jevrejski Pregled*, No. 3–6, 1990.

<sup>647</sup> Braham, Randolph L.: "Antisemitism and the treatment of the Holocaust in post-Communist East Central Europe". *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall 1994, 147.

<sup>648</sup> Čuruvija & Torov: 1995, 83–84.

<sup>649</sup> Sekelj 1998, 10.

<sup>650</sup> Sekelj 1998, 20.

<sup>651</sup> The unpopularity of the Society in the Belgrade Jewish community became obvious in a community election held in May 1992, which resulted a complete collapse of the list supported by the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society, with no one from that list being elected (Sekelj 1993, 80, footnote 66).

<sup>652</sup> Josif, a member of the SJFS presidency, gave the following public statement when the war in Bosnia broke out: 'The Serbs are a heavenly people, the leading nation in the world history...' (cited in Sekelj 1998, 11, footnote 15).

<sup>653</sup> Vuletić 1999, 11.

president of the Society, Ljubomir Tadić, and Dobrica Ćosić, president of Yugoslavia during the Milošević era, as the Belgrade daily *Borba* reported on April 1, 1988.<sup>654</sup> The nationalistic policy of the SJFS caused problems for the Federation as some outsiders viewed its statements as representing the Federation's line, and so a number of Jews left the Society when it became too involved in politics.<sup>655</sup>

Jaša Almuli, the former president of the Belgrade Jewish community, was outspokenly pro-Serbian and promoted Serbian interests amid collapsing Yugoslavia. He protested in a letter to the editor of *Jerusalem Post* about articles which were in his opinion anti-Serbian, and also built his defence of Serbia on the common suffering of Jews and Serbs in the Ustaša death-camps.<sup>656</sup> Almuli also defended common propaganda statements, such as that only Germans in the Nazi-occupied Serbia had carried out murders of Jews without co-operation on the part of Serbs, and highlighted the absence of antisemitism in Serbia.<sup>657</sup>

As Aća Singer has pointed out, the Serbian regime treated the Jewish minority well during the disintegration of Yugoslavia and after it for two reasons. The first is that the Jews were supposed to have influence in the USA, and the second is that by showing a tolerant attitude towards the Jews, Serbia was presenting the image of a democratic regime.<sup>658</sup> This deliberate *political* philosemitism was necessary in Serbia's efforts to evade the economic sanctions imposed by the UN by using its contacts with American and Israeli Jews.<sup>659</sup>

The vague but regularly employed concept of so-called 'Muslim fundamentalism' in Serbian propaganda must also be mentioned. It was correctly calculated that this concept would receive wide understanding in Israel, and consequently Kosovo and Bosnia were portrayed as a launching pad for Muslim fundamentalism to invade Europe, and naturally Serbia was the defender of the whole of Europe against this alleged invasion. Alexander Prelja, the Foreign Minister of Serbia, claimed that the resistance to a renewal of ties between Yugoslavia and Israel came mainly from Muslim fundamentalists in Bosnia.<sup>660</sup> The renewal of diplomatic ties, however, was not only opposed by certain factions in Bosnia, but also in Slovenia and Croatia.<sup>661</sup> In any case, Prelja's use of the term portrays 'fundamentalists' as a considerable political force in Bosnia. This was, of course, not the case. Ivan

<sup>654</sup> Cited in *Bilten* (Tel Aviv) 5/1988, 15.

<sup>655</sup> Singer 6.6.1996.

<sup>656</sup> Cited in the *Jerusalem Post* 21.5.1992.

<sup>657</sup> Cited in *The Times Literary Supplement* October 8, 1993, 21 and February 25, 1994, 15.

<sup>658</sup> Singer 6.6.1996.

<sup>659</sup> Heisler 8.6.1996.

<sup>660</sup> Cited in Lungen, Paul: "Yugoslavia studies renewing its ties with Israel". *The Canadian Jewish News*, January 11, 1990, 12.

<sup>661</sup> Lungen 1990a.

Čerešnješ, the wartime President of the Sarajevo Jewish community, said that fundamentalism existed in Bosnia, but without the political expression known elsewhere as part of Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>662</sup> Serbia explained Jewish emigration, not surprisingly, by Muslim (and Croat) terrorism, as the Belgrade-based daily *Politika* reported.<sup>663</sup> This is plain falsification of the facts, but suited well the general aims of Serbian propaganda.

The Serbs continued to make use of political philosemitism during the Kosovo war in order to stop the NATO attack. The Deputy Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Zoran Lilić sent a letter to the World Jewish Congress head Edgar Bronfman, invoking the 'traditional bond' between Jews and Serbs, and urging Bronfman to intervene to stop NATO attacks.<sup>664</sup> The Federation of Jewish Communities in Belgrade took a firmly pro-Serbian stand during the Kosovo war by issuing statements condemning the destructive attacks of NATO forces and requesting an immediate halt to the bombing campaign and the search for a peaceful, political solution to the Kosovo problem.<sup>665</sup> Aća Singer in an interview in the *Jerusalem Report* expressed Jewish feelings in Serbia during the NATO campaign by stating that 'all Jews oppose the raids, although not all of them support Milošević'.<sup>666</sup>

The course of political philosemitism took a somewhat different path in Croatia. The official line of Croatian policy on its relations with the Jewish minority was as expected. In the eyes of the world, Croatia had no choice but to dissociate itself from the burden of the Ustaša background of World War II, and to foster good relations with the Jews. This was essential in order to achieve the sympathy of the Western world during the war. The sympathy expressed reached the level of philosemitism according to the Croatian historian Ivo Goldstein.<sup>667</sup> In Serbia the philosemitic campaign focused on the SJFS, with less attention paid to the Jewish minority itself, and its legal representative body, the Federation. Indeed, an imitation of the SJFS was created in Croatia but at a much later stage of the conflict. Mihael Montiljo, former Vice-President of the Zagreb Jewish community and Deputy Foreign Minister of Croatia in the early 1990s, founded the Croatian-Israeli Society in 1994 in Zagreb. This society had a proportionately higher number of Jewish

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<sup>662</sup> Schwartz 1990, 152.

<sup>663</sup> Cited in *Oslobodenje* 15.4.1992.

<sup>664</sup> *Jerusalem Report* 26.4.1999.

<sup>665</sup> *Bilten* (Belgrade) 4/1999.

<sup>666</sup> Cited in *Jerusalem Report* 26.4.1999. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia made several announcements and appeals condemning the destructive attacks of the NATO air force. See, for example, the Announcement on March 28, 1999, the Statement on April 4, 1999, and the Appeal for Peace on April 5, 1999. In their appeal to the Government of Israel, dated March 28, 1999, the Federation requested the Israeli government to use its influence to halt those attacks.

<sup>667</sup> I. Goldstein 14.6.1996.

members than the SJFS in Serbia, because about 200 out of the total of 700 members of the Croatian-Israeli Society were Jews. The Society has concentrated on organising cultural events and published two books.<sup>668</sup> The Society's association with the politics of Franjo Tudjman is demonstrated by its close ties with the HDZ party, and besides cultural activities, its main function was to further rapprochement between Croatia and Israel.<sup>669</sup> Relations between the Society and the Zagreb Jewish community were problematic during the first years of the Society's activities due to its involvements in politics. More recently relations have improved.<sup>670</sup> Now the Society is even mentioned in a list of Jewish Organizations and Institutions in Zagreb.<sup>671</sup> However, the Croatian-Israeli Society never succeeded in achieving the same position as a political instrument as the older established Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society in Serbia.

Croatia's political philosemitism is more palpably seen in the state funding of Jewish activities and the considerable number of high positions occupied by Jews. As already observed, the Croatian government generously funded the renovation of the damaged Jewish centre in Zagreb, and similarly the renovation of the old synagogue in Split was funded by the state. The publication series *Studia Iudaico-Croatica* is also partly financed by the state.<sup>672</sup> These were remarkable gestures from a state which at the same time faced huge war expenditure. It can be argued that these funds were not granted on purely philanthropic grounds. It was clearly expected that the Jews would speak on behalf of Croatia, and some in fact did so. This way of thinking is clear in Slavko Goldstein's interview in *Globus* (May 14, 1993), in which the interviewer wonders, and asks Goldstein, why the Jewish community does not do more to combat the accusation by the government of Israel that the Republic of Croatia was the heir of the Independent State of Croatia.<sup>673</sup> Some prominent Jews, especially after the explosion in the community centre, were very co-operative with the Government, and later received high positions under Tudjman. Perhaps the prime example is Nenad Porges, who was the President of the Zagreb Jewish community at the time of the bombing, and later became a minister in the Tudjman government.<sup>674</sup> Porges openly supported Croatia's efforts to gain independence.<sup>675</sup> Besides Porges, in the course of 1991 several prominent members of the Jewish community in Zagreb had already accepted high positions in

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<sup>668</sup> Vuletić 1999, 53–54.

<sup>669</sup> Vuletić 1999, 54.

<sup>670</sup> Fischer 15.6.1996.

<sup>671</sup> *Voice*, Autumn 1998, 78.

<sup>672</sup> I. Goldstein 14.6.1996.

<sup>673</sup> Cited in *The Times Literary Supplement* 18.6.1993.

<sup>674</sup> S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

<sup>675</sup> Knežević 1992, 49.

Tudjman's administration<sup>676</sup> and Tudjman boasted in his letter to members of the U.S. Congress on January 21, 1992, that there were twelve Jews serving in high-ranking positions within the Croatian government, including the President of the Constitutional Court, two Judges of the Supreme Court, the Minister of Health, the Deputy Attorney General and the Deputy Foreign Minister.<sup>677</sup> There are similarities between this flood of Jews occupying high positions in Croatia, and the Serbian descent on Israel in 1990. Both moves exceeded all reasonable proportions, so to speak, and in Croatia the appointment of many Jews to high position coincided with the explosion at the community centre. Consequently these Jews in influential positions worked in order to foster Croatia's image, especially in its relation to the state of Israel and the Jewish world. Indeed, the pro-Croatian stand of the Jewish leadership was visible immediately after the explosion, when the representative of the Jewish Agency, Tuvia Raviv, visited the Zagreb Jewish community. Some of the leaders strongly criticised Israel for their reluctance to establish any contacts with Croatian regime. In their opinion, this step would have been essential, if for no other reason, at least for the security of the Jewish community in Croatia.<sup>678</sup> It can safely be assumed that Tudjman's policy of philosemitism was designed to influence world opinion, especially that of the United States and Israel.

The thinking behind the policy of philosemitic is extremely clearly expressed by *Croatia Weekly* No. 15, 1998:

many often wonder why contemporary Croatia needs Israel and speculate on the need for close relations with that country when only two or three thousand Jews live in Croatia. The answer is simple: it doesn't matter how many Jews live in Croatia and how many inhabitants Israel has. What matters is the extent of Israel's influence on international affairs.<sup>679</sup>

Philosemitism in Croatia did not derive, any more than in Serbia, from a basic attitude of tolerance, but only from the utilisation of tolerance for particular ends. Moreover, wavering between antisemitism and philosemitism in statements reflects a certain immaturity on the part of Croatia in its relations with the Jewish minority. This is best exemplified in the controversial personality of the late Franjo Tudjman.

Philosemitism was also utilised in disintegrating Yugoslavia in the Bosnian context. According to Ivan Čerešnješ, all three warring factions sought the support of the Jews for their cause. By showing a tolerant attitude towards the Jews, they wanted to demonstrate their democracy in the eyes of the international community

<sup>676</sup> Milentijević, Radmila: "Antisemitism and the treatment of the Holocaust in postcommunist Yugoslavia". In Randolph L. Braham (ed.): *Antisemitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*. New York: Columbia University Press 1994, 241.

<sup>677</sup> Cited in A. Knežević 1992, 16.

<sup>678</sup> Raviv 1997, 66.

<sup>679</sup> *Croatia Weekly*, No. 15, April 23, 1998.

and gain political benefit.<sup>680</sup> The charmed status of the Jews was one of the historical ironies of the bloody war in Yugoslavia, where former neighbours were slaughtering each other, in the evaluation of Ivan Čerešnješ and Jakob Finci. They attribute this situation, or 'good fortune', in part to the perception within Bosnia of the power and influence of the organised Jewish world in the West. 'By having Jews on their side, Croats, Serbs and Muslims think they will obtain international credibility for their democracy', added Čerešnješ.<sup>681</sup> Haris Silajdžić, prime minister of Bosnia, said in 1995 that Israel is important because it can set in motion Jewish opinion in the USA, which consequently affects American public opinion and American Government. One example of this was the appointment of a Jew, Sven Alkalaj, as Ambassador of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the United States. Alkalaj himself agrees that he was appointed partly because of his Jewishness.<sup>682</sup> The Bosnian government apparently thought – in line with the thinking behind philosemitic policy – that a Jewish ambassador would have a positive impact on the USA. In addition to this, David Kamhi from the Sarajevo Jewish community worked for a short period in a post at the Bosnian embassy in Madrid in 1995–96.<sup>683</sup> Political philosemitism was perceived as a threat by the Bosnian Jewish leaders and Jakob Finci clearly denounced it, stating that philosemitism was as dangerous as anti-semitism.<sup>684</sup>

In the particular case of Bosnia, it was not the philosemitic policy exercised by the government which maintained good relations between the authorities and Bosnian Jewish minority. The humanitarian aid distributed during the war in besieged Sarajevo by the Jewish Philanthropic Society La Benevolencija was the factor behind the relationship of respect.

Philosemitism in the context of the disintegration of Yugoslavia must be seen as a political tool, exercised by all the major parties in the Yugoslav conflict, i.e. Serbs, Muslims and Croats. Its earliest and most sophisticated form was created in the guise of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society in Belgrade. By this instrumentalisation, or functionalisation, to employ the term used by Sekelj, of the Jewish minority certain political ends were sought. At the same time, however, sporadic antisemitic incidents took place, especially in Serbia and Croatia. The slow process of property restitution bears witness to a lack of will and sympathy towards those whose property was either destroyed during the Second World War or nationalised later during the communist period. Political philosemitism amid the disintegration of Yugoslavia did not stem from the will to give equality to different national or

680 Čerešnješ 23.5.1999; *Jerusalem Post* 18.9.1992.

681 Cited in *Forward* 18.2.1994.

682 Cited in *Haaretz* 1.9.1995; *Yediot Aharonot* 28.7.1995.

683 Chabin, Michele: "Hanging on in Sarajevo". *Jerusalem Post Magazine* 25.7.1997, 8.

684 Finci 13.3.2000.

religious minorities. Therefore philosemitism was very limited in its conception, and derived from exactly the same considerations as political antisemitism.

The formerly rather secularised Bosnian Muslim community became more nationalistic and religious in the course of war, largely due to the indifference shown by the so-called international community to their plight, and Islamisation seemed to overshadow the long-term relationship between Muslims and Jews. The arms embargo imposed by the international community on all parties in former Yugoslavia prevented Bosnian Muslims from defending themselves and turned them against the West, and this consequently led to a situation in which Jews were viewed with suspicion.<sup>685</sup> Nowadays, several years after the Dayton Accord, with a relative state of peace existing in Bosnia, these assessments seem premature, and the pace of Islamisation in Bosnia has slowed down. During the war, Jews expressed their historical obligation to the Muslim community in Bosnia which had accepted Jews there 500 years before, in the words of Čerešnješ,<sup>686</sup> and in fact most Bosnian Jews advocated a unified Bosnia of three major nationalities, Muslims, Serbs and Croats.<sup>687</sup> Jakob Finci, current President of the Bosnian Jewish community, is of the opinion that so-called Muslim fundamentalism will be unable to put down roots in Bosnia.<sup>688</sup> Perhaps the most apt description of Bosnian Muslims is given by Paul Mojzes, who observed while travelling through the region that

Islam is more a cultural than religious identity for most Muslims in Yugoslavia and that they may well be one of the most secularized Muslims in the world, gravitating towards Europe rather than the Muslim world.<sup>689</sup>

This supports the assumption that Bosnian Jews are not going to face problems in the future, in spite of the fact that they live in the middle of a Muslim majority.

In general, the obsession with 'Jewish power' is clearly attested in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, in spite of the small number of Jews in these countries.<sup>690</sup> In particular, this obsession was strikingly evident in the political philosemitism exercised especially by the regimes of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia, when they misused the Jewish minority in order to achieve certain political ends, in

<sup>685</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle* 13.6.1995.

<sup>686</sup> Cited in *New York Times International* 15.11.1992.

<sup>687</sup> Schwartz, Stephen: "In defence of the Bosnian Republic". *World Affairs*, Vol. 156, No. 2, Fall 1993, 82.

<sup>688</sup> Finci 13.3.2000.

<sup>689</sup> Mojzes 1993, 25.

<sup>690</sup> Volovici, Leon: *Antisemitism in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: A Marginal or Central Issue?* (The Vidal Sassoon International Center For the Study of Antisemitism, Acta No. 5.) Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1994, 6-7.



spite of the Jewish efforts to emphasise that this was not their war<sup>691</sup>. In the context of the former Yugoslavia, the Jewish minority was very suited to exploitation as an instrument of policy, not only because of the belief in Jewish international power, but also because they made no territorial demands in a war which was mainly fought on territorial issues.

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<sup>691</sup> Singer 6.6.1996.

